

"We wanted to infuse and embed these technologies, not as add-ons, but as **integrated** parts of the course."

—Sharon Hoskinson, director, McGuire Center for Entrepreneurship

Big Problems, Simple Solution

Students in the entrepreneurship program choose to develop new ventures in one of two areas: corporate entrepreneurship, which focuses on projects that would work within an existing company, and traditional entrepreneurship, which focuses on startups. Beginning this year, students at the McGuire Center also are working with students from the University of Arizona's Rogers College of Law to explore the legal implications of their new ventures.

With so many groups accessing the same information—business students, law students, mentors, and corporate sponsors—wikis streamline what would otherwise be a more chaotic process, says Hoskinson. "Before this year, the collection of information was disparate at best, and it all needed to be located, identified, researched, and applied. Teams had to send documents and revisions to mentors and advisors, who had to check them and send them back to the teams," she says. "Students weren't able to capitalize on a full command of the information they had gathered, because there was just

too much going on." The wiki, she adds, has become a good solution to a big problem.

Eller's wikis work much like smaller versions of Wikipedia, the well-known user-created and user-edited online encyclopedia. Students and faculty post everything they do for the course to the wiki, including their initial ideas, research, and interactions with mentors. Each team's wiki is password protected. Any team member can modify the content, and when anyone updates or edits a wiki space, everyone involved in the project receives e-mail notifications of the changes.

Wikis not only help keep the project organized; they also keep everyone working at the same pace, says Hoskinson. For example, in the past, if students asked for a mentor's advice independently, other advisors could be left out of the loop. As a result, one well-meaning mentor's guidance could conflict with another's, throwing the team off track. "Wikis help us manage all of this knowledge in a way that the mentors can see, so they can understand how their input is going to impact the entire project," says Hoskinson.

Ways to Wiki

Teaching with blogs and wikis is a way to add a new dimension of learning to the business classroom, say Randy Accetta, Jim Jindrick, and Sharon Hoskinson of the University of Arizona. However, they recommend several think-ahead strategies for effectively embedding Web 2.0 technologies in a business course:

- Choose the right tool for the right job. "Blogs are great for posting newsletter-type information, which will soon be yesterday's news," says Jindrick. "Wikis are more appropriate for encyclopedic information such as business plans—they organize material that has long-term value."

- Before introducing blogs and wikis to the classroom, embed them in a few faculty activities as a painless way for faculty members to learn how to use them. "Professors shouldn't have to add on this skill just to teach a course," says Hoskinson.

- As a faculty champion for a Web 2.0-based course, choose a professor who already lives and breathes the latest communication technologies.

- Define course objectives clearly. Will students be using wikis to create business plans? Write a textbook? Learn to collaborate on teams? Setting course objectives ensures that the technology is embedded in the course as a means to an end, rather than as the means itself.

- Create a wiki template, complete with the categories that students will need to properly organize information for the project at hand. A template can serve as a guide to get students started, but also can be modified as needed.

- Hold a "Wiki 101" class. Even if professors are teaching younger students, they shouldn't assume all of those students are comfortable with these technologies. It makes sense to dedicate a short amount of time at the beginning of the course to show examples of wikis and blogs and discuss how they work. Minimal preparation up front can help all students become more comfortable with the technology.

- Choose a "techie" on each team to be its "wiki manager." Ideally, this team member should be comfortable with the technology and able to guide others through the process.

- Know your budget. Many blogging and wiki vendors offer free versions. The drawbacks, however, are that vendors will display advertising in the space and students won't be able to have a dedicated Web address. For a cost, which depends on the number of users and the extent of features, these companies also provide ad-free wiki and blogging tools that offer more versatility.

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